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Army, Russian (1991-)

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Army, Russian (1991-)

The Russian Federation Army has declined from the pinnacle of power in Red Army days. Under Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin's leadership it has experienced decline in financial and personnel resources while continually struggling to successfully conduct operations meeting current and emerging Russian national security requirements instead of Cold War-era scenarios.

The emerging post-Cold War security environment saw the emergence of asymmetric threats on the federation's periphery. Russia has conducted two wars against separatist, Islamist Chechen rebels. The First Chechen War (1994-1996) was disastrous for Russia with Moscow being unable to defeat the Chechens and having to settle for a negotiated peace. The Second Chechen War (1999-2009) saw the Russians rather brutally reassert control of this region, which remains highly volatile and has attracted foreign Islamist fighters.

Russia also seeks to use its Army to assert control over former Soviet Republics. In August 2008, it invaded Georgia after each country accused the other of exacerbating tensions in the separatist Georgian republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On August 7-8, Georgia launched an offensive against South Ossetia in hopes of reclaiming the territory. Moscow responded with increased military force, and fighting continued until a ceasefire on August 12. A European Union

sponsored cease fire occurred and Russia pulled back its forces by October 8, 2008, although regional tensions remain acute.

The Russians won militarily, but the conflict revealed significant weaknesses in the form of antiquated Soviet era tactics, nearly nonexistent command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) and night vision systems, and a deficient and obsolete global navigation satellite system. The conflict also showed that the Georgians were better equipped tactically than the Russian Army and were more flexible.

In response, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdiukov and President Dmitry Medvedev attempted to introduce reforms to transition the Army from a Soviet massed-base model fighting conventional wars on European plains or northern China. They sought to reduce the Russian military size from 1.13 million to 1 million men; to trim a bloated officer corps from 355,000 to 150,000; replace conscripts with professionals; to attract and retain high quality contract volunteers; and to develop a more agile, mobile, and professional force capable of effectively combating terrorist and insurgent forces. These reforms have had some success but have met significant opposition within the officer corps and other military oriented interest groups.

There is a significant disconnect between the Army's physical capabilities and doctrine. Russia's population has declined since the post-Soviet era and the Army has struggled to attract and retain quality forces which has been demonstrated in its unsuccessful conventional and counterinsurgency military operations. The persistence of the *dedovshchina*, a sadistically harsh but long entrenched system of brutalizing conscript troops, has produced numerous personnel deaths and suicides-- which does not make the army a desirable career option.

The Russian Federation's 2010 *Military Doctrine* considers NATO's force potential and desire to expand to Russian national borders and adjacent waters the chief threat to Russian security. This doctrine also warns of the purported dangers of western missile defense systems while also emphasizing the dangers of terrorism and outside powers promoting subversion against countries surrounding Russia. It acknowledges the increasing importance of information warfare, places critical reliance on nuclear weapons, and claims that Russia seeks to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The Russian Army has conducted military exercises with China and various Central Asian nations for ostensible antiterrorism purposes. It still retains significant conventional weapons forces which, although aging and unable to compete with superior western technologies and capabilities, could be used to

coerce neighboring non-NATO member countries. The Russian army should be concerned about how a nuclear Iran would affect its southern borders, but there is no effective legislative oversight of Russian army activities. China's increasing demographic presence in Russia's Far East is another problem that may impact the Russian army's force structure and operational planning.

The army still has significant political clout in Russia but its operational and doctrinal aspirations are far beyond its personnel and technological capabilities. Western countries' budget restraints, however, give it the chance to threaten western security interests in areas not under NATO's security architecture. Russia's annexation of Crimea and its threatening posture toward Ukraine during 2014 further served to demonstrate this paradox of Russian power.

Bert Chapman

See also: Chechen War, First (1994-1996); Chechen War, Second (War in the Northern Caucasus; October 1999-February 2000); *Dedovschina*; Georgian War, 2008)

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